

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9040

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 MANAGUA 0544

EXDIS

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: OVIP, NU (ROGERS, WILLIAM D.)

SUBJECT: ASSISTANT SECRETARY ROGERS MEETING WITH PRESIDENT SOMOZA

REF: MANAGUA 0494

1. SUMMARY: ON JANUARY 31, ASSISTANT SECRETARY ROGERS MET WITH PRESIDENT SOMOZA, FOREIGN MINISTER MONTIEL AND ME FOR THREE HOURS IN THE PRESIDENT'S OFFICE. THE DISCUSSION COVERED A WIDE RANGE OF TOPICS, BUT FOCUSED MAINLY ON CUBAN INTERVENTION IN NICARAGUA AND ANGOLA, US PRESS CRITICISM OF SOMOZA, SOMOZA'S MEDIATION OF EL SALVADOR-HONDURAS CONFLICT, NEED FOR STRONG OPPOSITION CONSERVATIVE PARTY, AND SOMOZA'S GRATITUDE FOR US EARTHQUAKE RECONSTRUCTION AID. ROGERS REASSURED SOMOZA OF CONTINUITY OF US POLICY OF FRIENDSHIP AND COOPERATION, AND REAFFIRMED OUR RIO TREATY COMMITMENTS. SOMOZA CAME AWAY IMPRESSED BY ROGERS FRIENDLY, LOW KEYED APPROACH AND GREATLY APPRECIATED THIS GESTURE OF US INTEREST AND ATTENTION.

2. CUBAN INTERVENTION IN NICARAGUA: SOMOZA SAID THAT CUBAN INTERVENTION IN NICARAGUA WAS A CONTINUING PROBLEM FOR HIS GOVERNMENT. RADIO HAVANA ATTACKED HIM REGULARLY AND INCITED THE NICARAGUAN PEOPLE TO REBELLION. CUBA CONTINUED TO TRAIN AND PROVIDE SAFEHAVEN FOR COMMUNIST GUERRILLAS. SINCE 1960 CUBA HAD INSTIGATED 45 ATTACKS ON NICARAGUA, THE MOST RECENT, SIGNIFICANT EFFORT WAS THE TERRORIST ATTACK A YEAR AGO IN MANAGUA THAT CLAIMED SEVERAL LIVES. HE SAID THAT HE WAS STILL TRYING TO PERSUADE CUBA TO RETURN THE \$1 MILLION RANSOM THAT HE PAID TO THE TERRORISTS

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WHICH CASTRO SEIZED WHEN THEY TOOK REFUGE IN HAVANA.

3. CUBAN INTERVENTION IN ANGOLA: SOMOZA TOLD ROGERS THAT HE WAS CONCERNED ABOUT THE LONG-TERM IMPACT OF CUBA'S MILITARY INTERVENTION IN ANGOLA, AND THE POSSIBLE SPREAD OF PRO-SOVIET REGIMES IN AFRICA. HE SAID, THAT IF THE CUBANS CAN GET AWAY WITH IT IN ANGOLA, WHY NOT SOMEWHERE ELSE? CUBA HAD BECOME DANGEROUS BECAUSE OF SOVIET BACKING, AND THE INABILITY OF THE US TO REACT DECISIVELY. ROGERS ASSURED SOMOZA THAT THE US PUBLIC VIEWED ANGOLA AND LATIN AMERICA VERY DIFFERENTLY. UNTIL RECENTLY, MOST AMERICANS HAD NEVER HEARD OF ANGOLA, WHEREAS US SECURITY IN LATIN AMERICAN HAD A LONG HISTORY. ROGERS POINTED OUT THAT THE RECENT REAFFIRMATION OF OUR COMMITMENT TO THE RIO TREATY WAS A VERY IMPORTANT ACT. SOMOZA SAID THAT THE RIO TREATY PROVIDED NICARAGUA WITH THE PROTECTION IT NEEDED. IT WAS, HE ADDED, UNFORTUNATE THAT THERE WAS NO RIO TREATY FOR ANGOLA. ROGERS ASSURED SOMOZA THAT THE US GOVERNMENT HAD EVERY INTENTION TO HONOR ITS RIO TREATY COMMITMENTS.

4. US PRESS CRITICISM OF SOMOZA. SOMOZA EXPRESSED HIS UNHAPPINESS ABOUT THE SYNDICATED ARTICLE OF VIRGINIA PREWITT THAT APPEARED AT THE END OF DECEMBER IN US NEWSPAPERS. HE SAID THAT PREWITT REPORTED THAT US POLICY TOWARDS NICARAGUA WAS CHANGING, AND THAT IT WAS UP TO THE STATE DEPARTMENT TO CORRECT FALSE STATEMENTS ABOUT US POLICY. HE ADDED THAT IF NICARAGUA WAS NOT UNDER STATE OF SIEGE (I.E., PRESS CENSORSHIP), THE OPPOSITION PRESS WOULD PUBLISH IT AND TRY TO STIR UP TROUBLE FOR HIM. SOMOZA ALERTED ROGERS TO THE POSSIBILITY THAT HE MAY HAVE TO CALL ON THE AMBASSADOR IN THE FUTURE TO ASK THE DEPARTMENT OT RESTATE US POLICY AND GET HIM OFF THE HOOK. ROGERS REPLIED THAT THE DEPARTMENT WOULD BE HAPPY TO ISSUE A STATEMENT OF US POLICY TOWARDS NICARAGUA, IF THAT WOULD BE HELPFUL. HE POINTED OUT, HOWEVER, THAT ALL POLITICAL LEADERS WERE SUBJECTED TO DISTORTED REPORTING AND CRITICAL PRESS TREATMENT. ROGERS SAID THAT HE KNEW VIRGINIA PREWITT AND THAT SHE WAS SOMETIMES VERY POORLY INFORMED. IN ANY CASE, SHE IS NOT CARRIED IN THE INFLUENTIAL NEWSPAPERS, AND NOT MUCH ATTENTION WAS PAID TO WHAT SHE SAID. THE AMBASSADOR TOLD SOMOZA THAT IT WAS OFTEN COUNTERPRODUCTIVE TO RESPOND TO UNIMPORTANT PRESS CIRITICISM AND THE BEST POLICY WAS USUALLY ONE OF MAINTAINING A LOW PROFILE. SOMOZA REPLIED THAT THERE WAS A PRESS CAMPAIGN IN THE UNITED STATES THAT WAS SECRET

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AIMED AT WEAKENING HIM AND HIS GOVERNMENT, AND HE REMINDED US OF THE SERIES OF JACK ANDERSON ARTICLES LAST YEAR. ROGERS REPLIED THAT NICARAGUA RARELY APPEARED IN THE AMERICAN PRESS AND RECEIVED ONLY MODERATE CRITICAL ATTENTION. OTHER LATIN COUNTRIES RECEIVED FAR MORE ADVERSE PUBLICITY. NICARAGUA WAS FORTUNATE IN THAT RESPECT.

5. SOMOZA'S ROLE AS REGIONAL MEDIATOR. ROGERS EXPRESSED

ADMIRATION FOR SOMOZA'S CONSTRUCTIVE EFFORTS TO MEDIATE THE EL SALVADOR-HONDURAS DISPUTE AND ENCOURAGE A PROMPT RESOLUTION OF THE CONFLICT. OBVIOUSLY PLEASED, SOMOZA REVIEWED HIS SECRET SHUTTLE DIPLOMACY LAST YEAR THAT BROUGHT THE TWO PRESIDENTS TOGETHER IN AN EFFORT TO FIND A COMPROMISE SOLUTION. HE TOLD ROGERS THAT HE HAD WARNED BOTH PRESIDENTS AT THE LAST SUMMIT MEETING OF CENTRAL AMERICAN PRESIDENTS IN GUATEMALA THAT THE CONTINUED FAILURE TO RESOLVE THE CONFLICT WOULD LEAD TO A BREAKING UP OF THE COMMON MARKET. SOMOZA SAID THAT HE SENT FOREIGN MINISTER MONTIEL TO SEE BOTH PRESIDENTS LAST WEEK TO REINFORCE HIS

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EARLIER THREAT TO PULL OUT OF THE COMMON MARKET UNLESS THE DISPUTE WAS SETTLED SOON.

6. NEED FOR STRONG CONSERVATIVE PARTY. SOMOZA SPOKE AT LENGTH IN A SOMEWHAT ELIPTICAL WAY ABOUT THE HISTORY OF LIBERAL PARTY ASCENDANCY (I.E., RULE BY THE SOMOZA FAMILY) IN NICARAGUA AND HIS CONCERN ABOUT THE WEAKNESS OF THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY, WHICH HE DESCRIBED AS THE LEGTIMATE OPPOSITION PARTY. HE STATED THAT HE FELT IT WAS NOT HEALTHY FOR THE SURVIVAL OF WHAT HE CALLED NICARAGUA'S CAPITALIST, PROPERTY-OWNING, TWO PARTY SYSTEM TO HAVE A FEEBLE CONSERVATIVE PARTY OPPOSITION, WHICH ENCOURAGED CONSERVATIVES AND OTHER OPPOSITION ELEMENTS TO TURN TO VARIOUS LEFTIST GROUPS IN FRUSTRATION. HE CITED THE EXAMPLE OF CONSERVATIVE PARTY SUPPORTERS WHO HAD BEEN FOUND TO BE HELPING THE FSLN GUERRILLAS. SOMOZA SAID THAT HIS AIM WAS TO PREVENT NICARAGUA FROM FALLING INTO THE HANDS OF THE COMMUNISTS. HE BELIEVED THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY MUST BE STRENGTHENED SO THAT THE TWO PARTY ALTERNATIVE WAS PRESERVED AFTER HE LEFT OFFICE.

7. GRATITUDE FOR US RECONSTRUCTION AID. SOMOZA EXPRESSED HIS GRATITUDE TO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE FOR THE GENEROUS ASSISTANCE GIVEN FOR THE RECONSTRUCTION OF MANAGUA AFTER THE 1972 EARTHQUAKE. HE SAID THAT THE NICARAGUAN PEOPLE NEVER HAD BEEN OFFERED THE OPPORTUNITY TO FORMALLY EXPRESS ITS APPRECIATION, ASIDE FROM THE EXTRAORDINARY OUTPOURING OF AFFECTION FOR AMBASSADOR SHELTON WHEN HE LEFT NICARAGUA. SOMOZA STATED HE WOULD LIKE TO INVITE A HIGH-LEVEL OFFICIAL, PERHAPS SECRETARY KISSINGER, TO VISIT NICARAGUA SO THAT THE NICARAGUAN PEOPLE COULD CONVEY
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THEIR WARM FEELINGS TOWARDS AMERICA. ROGERS ASID THAT HE APPRECIATED THE PRESIDENT'S OFFER AND WOULD GIVE SERIOUS THOUGHT TO IT. HE SUGGESTED THAT SOMOZA MIGHT WISH TO CONSIDER RAISING THE QUESTION OF SUCH A VISIT WITH SECRETARY KISSINGER WHEN SOMOZA MEETS WITH HIM IN SAN JOSE.

8. COMMENT: SOMOZA WAS PLEASED THAT ROGERS WANTED TO CALL ON HIM AND HE APPRECIATED THIS GESTUE OF US ATTENTION. HE WAS NOT CLEAR ABOUT THE MOTIVES OF THE VISIT, ALTHOUGH I HAD EXPLAINED THAT IT WAS SIMPLY A FRIENDLY, COURTESY VISIT TO EXCHANGE VIEWS ON A WIDE RANGE OF TOPICS OF MUTUAL CONCERN. SOMOZA CAME AWAY FROM THE MEETING IMPRESSED BY ROGERS AND HIS FRIENDLY, LOW KEYED APPROACH. HE PARTICULARLY APPRECIATED THE FACT THAT ROGERS CAME TO LISTEN AND NOT PREACH AT HIM. THIS REACTION WAS CONFIRMED BY DEFATT WHO SPOKE TO SOMOZA NEXT DAY, FEBRUARY 1, AT THE AIR FORCE DAY CEREMONY.

9. THE ROGERS VISIT SERVED THE USEFUL PURPOSE OF REAFFIRMING US POLICY OF FRIENDLY, COOPERATIVE RELATIONS WITH NICARAGUA AND DISPELLING SUSPICION THAT DEPARTMENT CONSIDERED SOMOZA A PARIAH. SOMOZA HAS BEEN HIGHLY SENSITIVE TO THE FACT THAT THE US HAS NOT FAVORED MANAGUA AS HIGH-LEVEL MEETING PLACE AND THAT NO HIGH-LEVEL US OFFICIAL HAS COME TO NICARAGUA SINCE SECRETARY OF STATE ROGERS TRIP TO MANAGUA AFTER THE 1972 EARTHQUAKE. ROGERS' CALL ALSO PROVIDED PERSUASIVE EVIDENCE OF CONTINUITY OF US POLICY TOWARDS NICARAGUA, WHICH IS ESPECIALLY HELPFUL TO SOMOZA IN COUNTERING RUMORS SPREAD BY OPPOSITION CIRCLES THAT US HAD CHANGED POLICY AND WAS COOLING TOWARDS HIM. MY ARRIVAL IN AUGUST, 1975 SET OFF SPATE OF RUMORS ALONG THESE LINES WHICH HAVE NOT YET COMPLETELY CEASED.

10. SOMOZA WAS IMPRESSED BY ROGERS REASSURANCE OF FIRMNESS OF US RIO TREATY COMMITMENTS AND THAT US INTERNAL STRENGTH AND COHESION WAS GREATER THAN IMPRESSION CONVEYED IN NEWSPAPERS. IN VIEW OF SOMOZA'S CONERN ABOUT CUBAN THREAT, THESE REASSURANCES ASSUAGED FEARS THAT US MIGHT BE CUTTING NICARAGUA ADRIFT TO FEND FOR ITSELF. ROGERS REINFORCED WHAT I HAD BEEN TELLING SOMOZA IN RECENT MONTHS.

11. SOMOZA WAS STUNG BY THE PREWITT ARTICLE. HIS HYPER-SENSIVITY TO ANY ARTICLES IN THE US PRESS THAT DECLARE, OR EVEN INSINUATE, SECRET

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THAT US IS CHANGING TOWARDS NICARAGUA REVEALS SOMOZA'S INSECURITY AND ALMOST MORBID CONCERN ABOUT THE IMAGE AS WELL AS SUBSTANCE OF US POLICY. HE IS PERFECTLY AWARE THAT THERE HAS BEEN NO CHANGE IN THE SUBSTANCE OF OUR POLICY. YET HE HAS AN EXAGGERATED FEAR, OR DISLIKE, OF PRESS ACCOUNTS, AND EVEN RUMORS, THAT US POLICY IS SHIFTING. WHAT SOMOZA WANTS IS NOT MERELY THE REALITY BUT THE UNCHALLENGED IMAGE, OF UNCONDITIONAL US SUPPORT AND COMPLETE IDENTIFICATION WITH HIS REGIME.

12. PRESIDENT WAS HIGHLY GRATIFIED BY ROGERS EXPRESSION OF APPRECIATION AND ADMIRATION FOR SOMOZA'S CONSTRUCTIVE EFFORTS TO MEDIATE THE EL SALVADOR-HONDURAS DISPUTE. HE WAS ANXIOUS TO REPORT THE DETAILED STORY OF HIS SECRET DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS TO BRING ABOUT A RESOLUTION OF THE CONFLICT, AND HE WAS QUITE OBVIOUSLY PROUD OF HIMSELF. SOMOZA VIEWS HIMSELF AS THE ELDER STATESMAN IN CENTRAL AMERICA, A ROLE FOR WHICH HE FEELS HE IS NOT GIVEN SUFFICIENT RECOGNITION. WHATEVER HIS MOTIVES, SOMOZA IS A POSITIVE FORCE FOR PEACE IN CENTRAL AMERICA, AND SECRETARY KISSINGER SHOULD CONSIDER MENTIONING THAT FACT IN HIS PRIVATE TALK WITH SOMOZA IN SAN JOSE.

13. SOMOZA'S STATEMENT ABOUT HIS INTEREST IN STRENGTHENING THE CONSERVATIVES MUST BE TAKEN WITH A GRAIN OF SALT. ON THE ONE HAND, FOR REASONS HE STATED, AS WELL AS HIS INSISTENCE IN USING DEMOCRATIC RHETORIC AND PORTRAYING NICARAGUA AS A LAND OF LIBERTY, HE FEELS CONSTRAINED TO PRODUCE A PLAUSIBLE OPPOSITION. ON THE OTHER HAND, HIS ACTIONS VERY CLEARLY SUGGEST THAT HE WILL NOT TOLERATE A STRONG, VIABLE OPPOSITION THAT IS CAPABLE OF CHALLENGING HIM IN AN OPEN CONTEST. THEBERGE

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